

W/Secretary

2/16/48



407, 407

~~Top Secret~~

Mr Secretary:

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Since the conversation last night was rather general, and I will not be there tomorrow I feel I owe it to you and to the President to set forth my views on this matter as succinctly as possible. They are as follows.

1. The existence of Soviet MRBN bases in Cuba cannot be tolerated. The objective therefore is their elimination by whatever means may be necessary.
2. There are two means in essence. (a) by diplomatic action or (b) by military action.
3. No one can ~~guarantee~~ guarantee that this can be achieved by diplomatic action - but it seems to me essential that this channel should be tested out - where military action is employed. If our decision is firm (and it must be) I can see no danger in communicating with Khrushchev privately worded in such a way that he realizes that we mean business.
4. This I consider an essential first step no matter what military course we determine on.

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5. I don't feel so strongly about a message to Castro + this could be dropped.
6. My chief concern about a strike without any diplomatic effort is that it will inevitably lead to war with Cuba + would not be the best quick disposal of these bases as was suggested. Furthermore I am reasonably certain that the Allied reaction would be dead against us, especially if the Soviet retaliated locally (as ~~Spain~~ Turkey or Italy or in Berlin).
7. A communication to Washington would be very useful for the record in establishing our case for action.
8. In general I feel that a declaration of war would be valuable since it would open up every avenue of military action - air strikes, invasion or blockade. But we would have to make a case before our allies to justify such a declaration of war. But if we acted first and sought to justify it later we would be in a spot of great consequence.
9. Finally I feel very strongly that any belief in a limited quibble action is an illusion and would lead us into a full war with Cuba.

Since the conversation last night was rather general, and I will not be there tomorrow I feel I owe it to you and to the President to set forth my views on this matter as succinctly as possible. They are as follows.

1. The existence of Soviet MRBM bases in Cuba cannot be tolerated. The objective thereof is their elimination by whatever means may be necessary.
2. There are two means in essence. (a) by diplomatic action or (b) by military action.
3. No one can ~~guarantee~~ guarantee that this can be achieved by diplomatic action - but it seems to me essential that this channel should be tested out - before military action is employed. If our decision is firm (and it must be) I can see no danger in communicating with Khrushchev privately worded in such a way that he realizes that we mean business.
4. This I consider an essential first step no matter what military course we determine on if the reply is ~~unfavorable~~ unsatisfactory. The tone & tenor of his reply will tell us something but I don't believe a threat of general nuclear ~~war~~ war should deter us. If he renounces it, he would have so reacted even if the strike had come first.

SECRET

6. My chief concern about a strike without any diplomatic effort is that it could immediately lead to war with Cuba & would not be the best most graceful disposal of these bases as was suggested. Furthermore I am reasonably certain that the Allied reaction would be dead against us, especially if the Soviet retaliated locally (as ~~Spain~~ Turkey or Italy or in Berlin).

7. A communication to Khrushchev would be very useful for the record in establishing our case for action.

8. In general I feel that a declaration of war would be valuable since it would open up every avenue of military action - air strikes, sea mines or blockade. But we would have to make a case before we allies to justify such a declaration of war. But if we acted first and sought to justify it later we would be in a spot of great consequence.

9. Finally I feel very strongly that any belief in a limited quibble action is an illusion, and would lead us into a full war with Cuba on a step by step basis which would greatly increase the possibility of General War.

The best course in my view would be a carefully worded & serious letter to Khrushchev & when the reply is received (if it is unsatisfactory) communicate with our principal allies to unify them

of our reputation - then ask Congress for a
declaration of war, with a suitable statement
of the reasons and all appropriate preparations.

I have excise the hand writing but I have
no time to have it typed. If the Board
asks about my opinion they will consult
it. Good luck.

Charles E. Bohlen

I have seen of course many other copies - but
the above seem to me the essentials. I don't
quite see the urgency of military action -
it looks as if we have already initiated diplomatic
action. we should be able to handle it.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~ OADR

~~TOP SECRET - EYES ONLY~~

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(Copy of hand-written memorandum)

Mr. Secretary:

Since the conversation last night was rather general, and I will not be there tomorrow I feel I owe it to you and to the President to set forth my views on this matter as succinctly as possible. They are as follows.

1. The existence of Soviet MRBM bases in Cuba cannot be tolerated. The objective therefore is their elimination by whatever means may be necessary.

2. They are two means in essence: (a) by diplomatic action or (b) by military action.

3. No one can guarantee that this can be achieved by diplomatic action--but it seems to me essential that this channel should be tested out before military action is employed. If our decision is firm (and it must be) I can see no danger in communicating with Khrushchev privately worded in such a way that he realizes that we mean business.

4. This I consider an essential first step no matter what military course we determine on if the reply is unsatisfactory. The tone and tenor of his reply will tell us something but I don't believe a threat of general nuclear war should deter us. If he means it, he would have so reacted even if the strike had come first.

5. I don't feel so strongly about a message to Castro and this could be dropped.

6. My chief concern about a strike without any diplomatic effort is that it will inevitably lead to war with Cuba and would not be the neat quick disposal of their bases as was suggested. Furthermore I am reasonably certain that the Allied reaction would be dead against us, especially if the Soviet retaliated locally (vs. Turkey or Italy or in Berlin).

7. A communication to Khrushchev would be very useful for the record in establishing our case for action.

8. In general I feel that a declaration of war would be valuable since it would open up every avenue of military action--air strike, invasion or blockade. But we would have to make a case before our Allies to justify such a declaration of war. But if we acted first and sought to justify it later we would be in a spat of great consequences.

9. Finally

~~TOP SECRET - EYES ONLY~~

~~SECRET~~ OADR

~~SECRET~~ *CHDR*

~~TOP SECRET - EYES ONLY~~

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9. Finally I feel very strongly that any belief in a limited quick action is an illusion and would lead us into a full war with Cuba on a step-by-step basis which would greatly increase the possibility of general war.

The best course in my view would be a carefully worded and serious letter to Khrushchev and when the reply is received (if it is unsatisfactory) communicate with our principal Allies to inform them of our intention and then ask Congress for a declaration of war with a suitable statement of the reason and all adequate (appropriate ?) preparations.

Please excuse the handwriting but I have no time to have it typed. If the President asks about my opinion this will constitute it. Good luck.

Charles E. Bohlen

There are of course many other angles but the above seem to me the essentials. I don't quite see the urgency of military action--if it leaks and we have already initiated diplomatic action we should be able to handle it.

~~SECRET~~ *CHDR*

~~TOP SECRET - EYES ONLY~~